



Organising an Interfaith Vigil

Why an interfaith vigil?

Faith communities have a unique contribution to make in the climate crisis. They can speak with moral urgency on a topic that is often technocratic and bogged down in policy detail. Faith communities transcend national borders and have global reach. Faith-based and faith-inspired communities exist in all countries of the world and are often disproportionately affected by adverse climate effects, especially in the Global South.

People from diverse faith traditions have always lived together and cared for one another. Many have worked for a common purpose that reflects the values of their communities, including compassion, care and critical self-examination. This common purpose has often challenged situations of injustice, conflict and violence, including those perpetrated by or within faith communities.

One powerful way of collectively demonstrating a faith-inspired common purpose is through holding a vigil. Vigils that are interfaith can become potent spaces to channel the accumulated wisdom of the many traditions that so enrich our world. They allow people to meet in open and humble contemplation – something that is essential for us all to cultivate a more effective response to the climate emergency. When done well, they are exemplary models of working together to achieve wholeness and justice for all.



Guiding principles

If you're thinking of holding an interfaith vigil, or if you are seeking to incorporate a faith dimension to an existing vigil, here are a few fundamentals that can help, based on our experience at Faith for the Climate:

1. Be welcoming

There is a rich tapestry of faith communities that call the UK home. In addition to churches from many major Christian denominations, you can often find synagogues, mosques, mandirs, gurdwaras and other places of worship even in small towns and villages. Within Christianity, there is a wonderful diversity of denominations and congregations.

Try to include voices from the minority denominations and faiths that reflect this diversity. It is well worth the effort to go beyond traditional gatekeepers and the same voices that are often heard in the conversation. Seek out emerging or informal leaders and committed truth tellers.

Also, faith communities are internally diverse. Hearing from a diversity of voices from *within* traditions can act as a leveller, as everyone has unique insights to offer through engagement with their own faith.

2. Be informed

If you're reaching out to a faith community or an individual you have not worked with before, take some time to do some research. Does the tradition have specific central texts, or are its teachings manifested in other ways? What is that community's unique story within your local area and within the social fabric in Britain? What other social justice or community-building work might the community be known for, and what unique solutions or insights does their faith tradition offer?



Consult [Faith for the Climate's resources page](#) and/or the [Inter Faith Network](#) for more general resources on faith groups in the UK. If there are faiths that are unfamiliar to you, you can get up-to-date, evidence-based and unbiased information from the [Information Network Focus on Religious Movements \(INFORM\)](#).

It's important not to fixate on numbers. Create an atmosphere where people have equal space and standing, and are all seen and validated, regardless of their total 'numbers'. After all, 'membership' and even 'leadership' is very difficult to define or quantify for different religions and even different groupings within the same parent tradition.

3. Be bold

There are as many ways to be an individual person of faith as there are people of faith. Help to debunk well-worn and damaging stereotypes or caricatures when approaching and working with those from different faith traditions.

Stereotypes are especially harmful when they disempower certain groupings *within* particular religious communities or distort their experiences. Reach out to and engage with people who have been traditionally marginalised in different faith communities, especially on the basis of race, gender, social class, geographical location, disability, language and age. Everyone has the potential to bring a unique, necessary perspective on the intersections of faith and climate justice.

4. Be open

An interfaith vigil can be a powerful space of learning, where we can all have our assumptions challenged and horizons expanded. It's a chance to be vulnerable in a safe space.

At Faith for the Climate, we avoid making our vigils polemical or politically partisan. They are spaces to cultivate inspiration, community and mutual care so that we can all tackle the climate emergency more meaningfully together.



Practical tips

Planning a stand-alone interfaith event, or something as part of a bigger mobilisation, e.g., Loss and Damage Action Day, the Great Big Green Week, or Faiths 4 Climate Justice? Following the guiding principles set out above, here are some handy pointers.

Start by setting the purpose of your event

E.g. Making visible local faith-based support for climate justice, building relationships and connections between people of faith

Draft your theme, and put together initial thinking for venue/date/time/format

E.g. 'Faiths 4 Climate Justice', 'Counting the cost of climate injustice', 'Addressing climate-related loss and damage', 22 September, 4pm-5pm, Victoria Park

If you have several options for venues, check their availability for the potential dates and times you are looking at, and find out any associated costs or restrictions on their use. You may choose to hold your event online, in which case the same applies. Check what sort of account you will need to be able to host, and whether this has an associated cost. Build in an opportunity for a rehearsal to ensure the tech runs smoothly.

Write down a list of people to get in touch with

You may like to write several lists – those people who might form a small planning group with you, others that would be good to invite as participants, others that may attend. You should think about whether the list you write is representative, and whether it covers people with all the skills needed to pull together the event. To get your ideas flowing, you can visit [Faith for the Climate's resources page](#) and the [Inter Faith Network](#) for more general resources on faith groups in the UK.



If you don't know who to talk to, make a plan for how to fill the gaps. Who of your existing contacts might be able to make a personal introduction? Can you go and introduce yourself in person? Using people's phone numbers often gets a better response than emailing people cold.

Confirm overall purpose, theme, and logistics and agree invitations

With your planning group, go through the overall vision for the event, and examine any uncertainties. What are you able to confirm? You can't publicise or make invitations without a confirmed shape to your event.

You will need your vigil to be able to accommodate a number of contributions from a variety of perspectives. Use your theme to create coherence, and suggest to participants that contributions each follow a similar format.

E.g. 'Introduce yourself and tell a story about how you came to realise the importance of climate justice, and share something from your faith tradition (like a prayer or part of your sacred text). We'd like you to end by saying the sentence "My hope for my local area's/community's/country's commitment to climate justice is that.....". Contributions should last no longer than 5 minutes.'

Decide who you would like to invite to make a contribution, and who in your group will make the invitation to these people.

Revisit your purpose – do your plans so far fit with this?

It's easy to get swept along by logistics. Check that what you're planning achieves what you've decided is your purpose.

E.g. if your purpose is **visibility**... have you got photos, local press contacts, and a draft press release? Have you defined who you want to



be visible to? How will you reach this audience or include and invite them along? How will you communicate your event to involve those who are unable to attend in person? What are the relevant social media hashtags you can use? How can you coordinate the sharing of images and videos on social media to tell your story?

OR, if your purpose is **building lasting relationships...** could you start with asking all attendees to greet one another in some way, or have an ice-breaker question as part of your format? Is there something you want to point attendees to as a follow-up?

Publicise

Don't miss out this step, and plan for it earlier than you think – information takes time to circulate. Think about local groups and networks, and social media. Think about what image and text you want people to share - make it easy and clear and more people will pass on the information.

Details! Details! More Details!

If you've not thought about the details, no one else has. Now is the time to think about how everything fits together, and how to best communicate these expectations to everyone participating.

You may want to think through the event in your head. If you can't think about each step of the event, and how you are managing the different variables, you likely have more questions to answer. Have you communicated all of your expectations about how the event will run, or are some of the details only in your head?

E.g. How do you know how many people to expect? Is there a running order? Will people be standing, sitting, and in what formation? What accessibility considerations need factoring in? Who is going to take photos and how will they be shared after the event, and do you have



the relevant permission from participants (same applies for recordings of online events)? Who will be there to welcome on the day, and who should people phone if they are running late? How will you close the event?

Follow-ups and thank-yous

It's easy to think your job is done when everyone is home. Not quite.... Send a follow up email and thank everyone who has contributed. Review with your planning group what went well or didn't and seek the feedback of participants. Celebrate what you've achieved and debrief with others. And then ... rest!

The Faith for the Climate Team